

Ancient Nalanda University

Dr. Manoj Kumar

Assistant Professor (Guest)

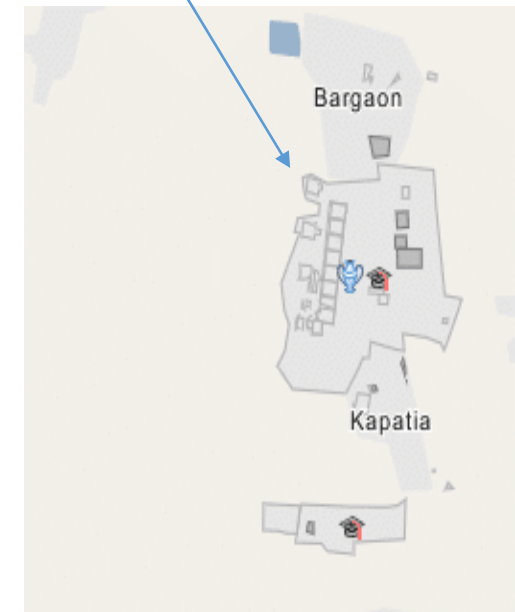
**Dept. of A.I.H. & Archaeology, Patna University, Patna-
800005**

P.G./ M.A. IVth Semester ,

Paper- History of Indian Buddhism (E.C.)

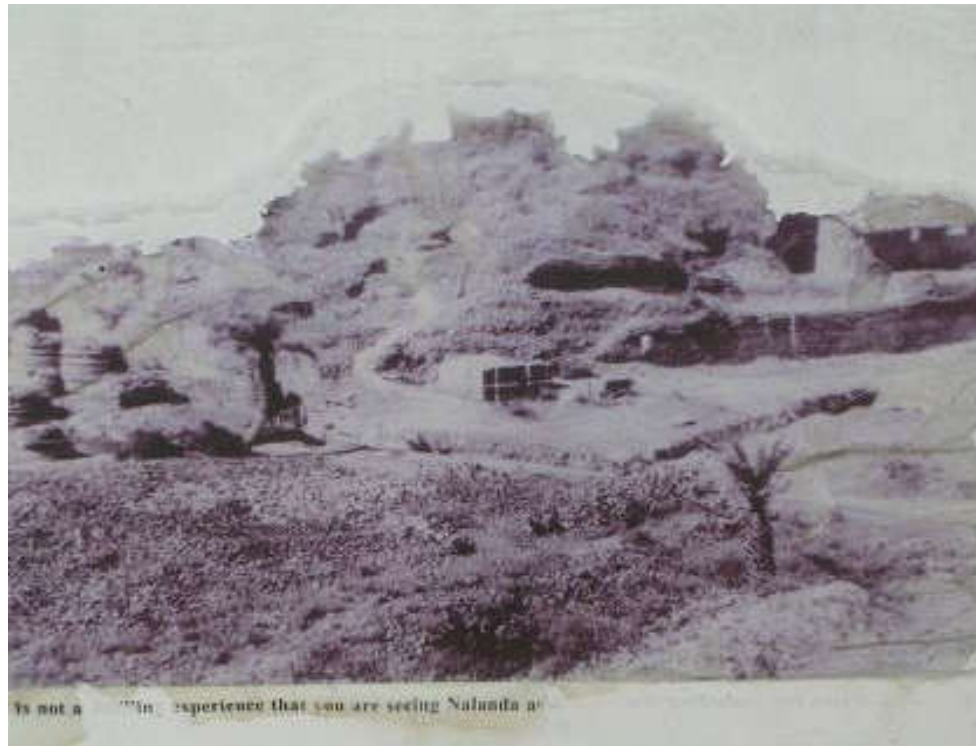
General introduction

- It is situated 7 miles south-west of Biharsharif and 7 miles north of Rajgir.
- Buchanan was the first to notice its antiquity and as told by Brahmanas there, he took it to be the site of ancient Kundalapura, the capital of the king Bhimaka, the father of Rukmini.
- Buchanan felt that the ruins represented a Buddhist site.
- Kittoe who next realized the importance of the site in 1847 and had seen the images at Baragaon mistakenly took the area to be a Br



General Introduction

- It was Alexander Cunningham who identified the extensive site as Nalanda in 1861-62.



- Alexander Cunningham had made some trial digs but carried no large scale excavations.
- In 1871 or so, Broadly, the then S.D.O. of Bihar, began excavations on the main mound with 1000 labourers, and within 10 days he laid bare the eastern, western and southern facades of the great temple and published a short reports of the excavations.



Nalanda: Center of Buddhist Religion and Learning in Ancient India

History of Nalanda goes back to the days of Mahavira and Buddha in 6th century B.C. It was the place of birth and Nirvana of Sariputra, one of the famous disciples of Buddha. The place rose into prominence in 5th century A.D as a great monastic-cum-educational institution for oriental art and learning in the whole Buddhist world attraction students from distant countries including China. The galaxy of Luminaries associated with it includes Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Vasubandhu, Dharmapala, Suvishnu, Asanga, Silabhadra, Dharmakirti, Shantarakshita and celebrated Chinese travelers Hiuen-Tsiang and I-Tsing who have extensively described the monasteries and shrines at Nalanda and life of Monks there. Various subjects like theology, Grammar, Logic, Astronomy, Metaphysics, medicine and philosophy were taught here. The institution was maintained by the revenue collected from the villages bestowed specifically for the purpose by the contemporary rulers as evident from inscriptions.



Nalanda Mahavira, regarded as one of the greatest universities of ancient world, was founded by Kumaragupta first (412-455 A.D) of the great Gupta dynasty, king Harshavarshana of Kannauj (606-647 A.D) and the Pala kings of east India (8th-12th century A.D) continued to extend patronage to this center. The decline of this great institution started in later Pala period but the final blow came in around 1200 A.D by the invasion of Bakhtiyar Khilji.



Present Entrance to Nalanda Excavation Site

Excavations conducted by archaeological survey of India during 1915-37 and 1974-82 have exposed the extensive remains of six brick temples and eleven monasteries arranged on a systematic layout and spread over an area more than a square kilometer. Basically a thirty meter wide passage runs North-South with the row of temples on the west and that of the monasteries on the east of it. The dimensions and disposition of rooms within monasteries is almost identical.



Ruins of Nalanda

The most imposing structure is temple no 3 at the southern extremity, which was constructed in seven phases. It is surrounded by a number of votive stupas and other minor shrines.



Temple No. 3

Earlier four phases are too dilapidated and very small in dimensions which have been concealed again. Fifth, Sixth and seventh phase may be seen clearly with their separate staircase. On the basis of art and architecture, the fifth phase has been assigned to sixth century A.D. which contains beautiful stucco images placed in the niches on the exterior walls of the temple. Decorative solid towers were erected at four corners but only two are now visible. Sixth and seventh phases are further enlargement in dimensions by the way of concealing the earlier structure. Contrary to the general scheme of other temples at the site this temple is facing to north. The pedestal atop once contained a colossal image probably of Buddha. A large number of votive stupas and miniature shrines have been added around this temple by the devotees at the different points of time among which a chariot shaped shrine near the south-east corner is worth mentioning.

This monastery is considered to be the most important among the group of monasteries from chronological revealing nine levels of occupation as indicated by superimposed structures, drains and floors. The lower monastery was erected during the reign of Devapala (Circa 810-50 AD) by a king of Sumatra as hostels for the monks. It had a central rectangular courtyard, pillared verandah all around in form of cells, a shrine at the middle of eastern arm, a well, a teacher's platform and the entrance towards west; It was at least double storied as evident by the staircase at South-west corner. The upper monastery have 34 cells containing bed-platforms for monks and shelves for keeping books and valuables in the corners of few cells, pillared verandah in front and entrance towards west approachable through a massive flight of steps. The solid oblong shrine in the courtyard is a later addition whereas the small shrine close to it belongs to Gupta period.

With the northern high wall of the courtyard are co-structured two chambers containing corbelled entrance and vaulted roof is also a later addition. The evidence of destruction of Nalanda by fire can be noticed in few cells and stucco images are also placed in the Niches of the portico.



Monastery no 1

This monastery is almost square on plan having two phases, the later constructed over ruins of an earlier one. The staircase exposed at the south-west corner suggests that the earlier monastery was at least double storied. The later monastery contains twenty cells for the monks. It has a shrine at the middle of the eastern arm, teacher's platform in front of the shrine, an open courtyard with residential cells all around attached to a pillared verandah, well in the courtyard, drainage, entrance towards west and staircase at both the levels. Provision of ventilator for skylight near the staircase and provision of bed in few cells are special attractions of this monastery.



Monastery no 04

This monastery does not conform to the nature and general scheme of the other monasteries. Its northern and southern arms are having only three cells whereas the eastern arm has two rows of eight cells. Some of the cells in front row are connected with Verandah whereas few cells are inter linked with corbelled doors. No door has been noticed for the cells in the back row. A large staircase descending from the south-east corner of monastery no 04 connects with monastery. On the basis of antiquarian finds it appears to be constructed during Gupta period.



Monastery no 5

This structure too has the evidence of erecting later monastery over the ruins of an earlier one. It contains brick paved courts at two different levels with pillared verandah and cells all around. Each level has thirty two cells, the shrine, a well and west facing entrance. A feature of interest is the two sets of double ovens in the upper courtyard which might have been used for community cooking or for some practical demonstrations to the students. The drains attached to the ovens do not have any archaeological significance as these are modern addition for the disposal of rain water.



Corridor connecting monasteries in Nalanda

Similar to other monasteries this one also has common features like entrance on West central court with verandah all around and the cells for the monks, well, shrine in the middle of the eastern arm etc. But two features are peculiar in this monastery. First is the imposing central shrine facing west with a court in front and the second is the door lintel preserved to its original height in a cell at south east corner. This technique of doorway with dentil cornice is only one and unique example saved at Nalanda. Wooden lintels have been replaced with modern concrete lintels for the sake of conservation. Two levels of occupation can be seen in this monastery also.

Monastery no 8



Monastery no 09

This monastery is also almost similar to other monasteries in size and plan containing thirty four cells meant for the hostel for monks. The court contains a well, six ovens and drain at the north east corner for disposal of water. The shrine chamber in the middle of the eastern arm, entrance towards west, staircase at south-west corner and provision for sky light near stairs like that in monastery 04 are some common features of the monastery. One room created by blocking the northern end of the western verandah and having corbelled door seems to be added later.

This monastery too is almost similar to others in size and plan and contains usual features like central court, entrance from the west, shrine chamber, veranda, court, cells for monks, staircase and skylight provision etc. But few features are uncommon and worth mentioning. First is the arched door opening of rooms, which can be seen in the southern half of the western arm. Secondly this monastery had postern doors on the either ends of the eastern arm opening in the east which were blocked in later phase. And the third is a massive wall in place of pillars blocking seven western rooms of the southern arm in later phase. The seven rooms have uncommon features and seem to be meant for some different purpose. Similar wall in place of pillars can be seen at the north-east corner of the Verandah also. Besides, a platform like structure with stairs raised at South-West corner of the court and a cistern like structure interiorly veneered with flag stones near the southern postern door are also peculiar. The monastery contains two phases of construction.



Monastery no 10

Conforming to the general scheme of other monasteries this one also has the common features like central court, pillared veranda all around, thirty rooms for monks, provision for skylight and staircase at the south west corner, shrine in the middle of the eastern arm and entrance towards the west. The fragments of stone pillars of its veranda, still standing at their original position are worth mentioning. The height of the veranda would have been a little more than two meters which can be guessed easily by the beam-holes in its wall near the staircase. Well has not been found in the court and the shrine chamber contains circumambulatory path in this monastery.



Monastery no 11

Having two phases of construction this temple is quite, attractive and grandiose from art and architecture points of view. The later phase has been created over the ruins of the earlier one on same plan. The exterior of the earlier temple is decorated with pilasters ornamental moldings and niches for containing stucco images whereas that of the later one is mostly plain. The temple is facing to east built over raised and almost square platform measuring 52*50 meters. Approachable through a flight of steps, the main temple stands at the center of the structure whereas four corners are occupied by four subsidiary shrines which still contain the remnants of stucco image installed on pedestal. It's first phase is comparable to the fifth phase of temple no-03 and datable to sixth century art and architecture points of view.



Monastery no 12

NALANDA UNIVERSITY

- It has been called “ One of the earlist Universities in the world.
- It was founded in the 4th Century B C by the Gupta Empire, Known as the ancient seat of learning.
- Contribution also was given by – The King Harshwardhan, Kumar Gupta, Dharmpal.
- It was a Buddhist enter of learnig from 427 to 1197 CE.
- It become the crown jewel of the Development of Buddhism in india and the world.
- First residential inter National University of the world.
- It accommodated over 2000 teachers and 10,000students from all over the world.



Libraries:

*The Library of Nalanda, Known as Dharma gunj(Mountain of Truth) or Dharmagunja(Treasury of truth), was the most renowned repository of Buddhist Knowledge in the world at the time.

*The library had three main buildings – *Ratnasagar, Ratnodadhi and Ratnaranjaka*.

* Each building was nine stories high and had an enormous collection of books that covered various subjects ranging from religion, literature, astrology, astronomy, medicine and much more.

Curriculum:

*Learning was Greatly encouraged as it served dual Purpose Knowledge practice.

*Courses were drawn from every field of learning, Buddhist and hindu, sacred and secular, foreign and native.

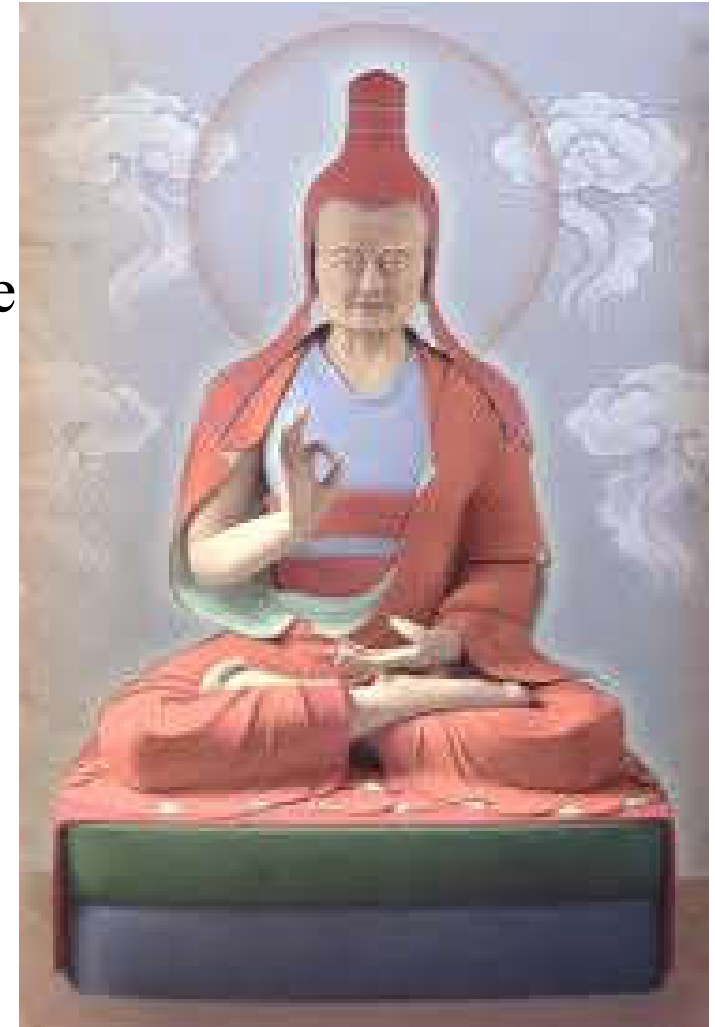
*Students studied science astronomy, Medicine, and logic as diligently as they applied themselves to metaphysics, philosophy, Samkhya, yoga-shastra, the veda and the scriptures of Buddhism.

*Nalanda was also the most global university of its times, attracting pupil and scholars from korea, japan, china, Tibet, Indonesia etc.



Great Scholar of Nalanda University:

- Chinese traveler and Scholar, Xuanzang(Hsuan-Tsang), 7th Century AD visited Nalanda and left a vivid account of the curriculum and of the general features of the community.
- Famous Philosophers like Shilabhadra , Nagarjuna and Mahayana were among the few scholars of Nalanda.



Fall of Nalanda University:

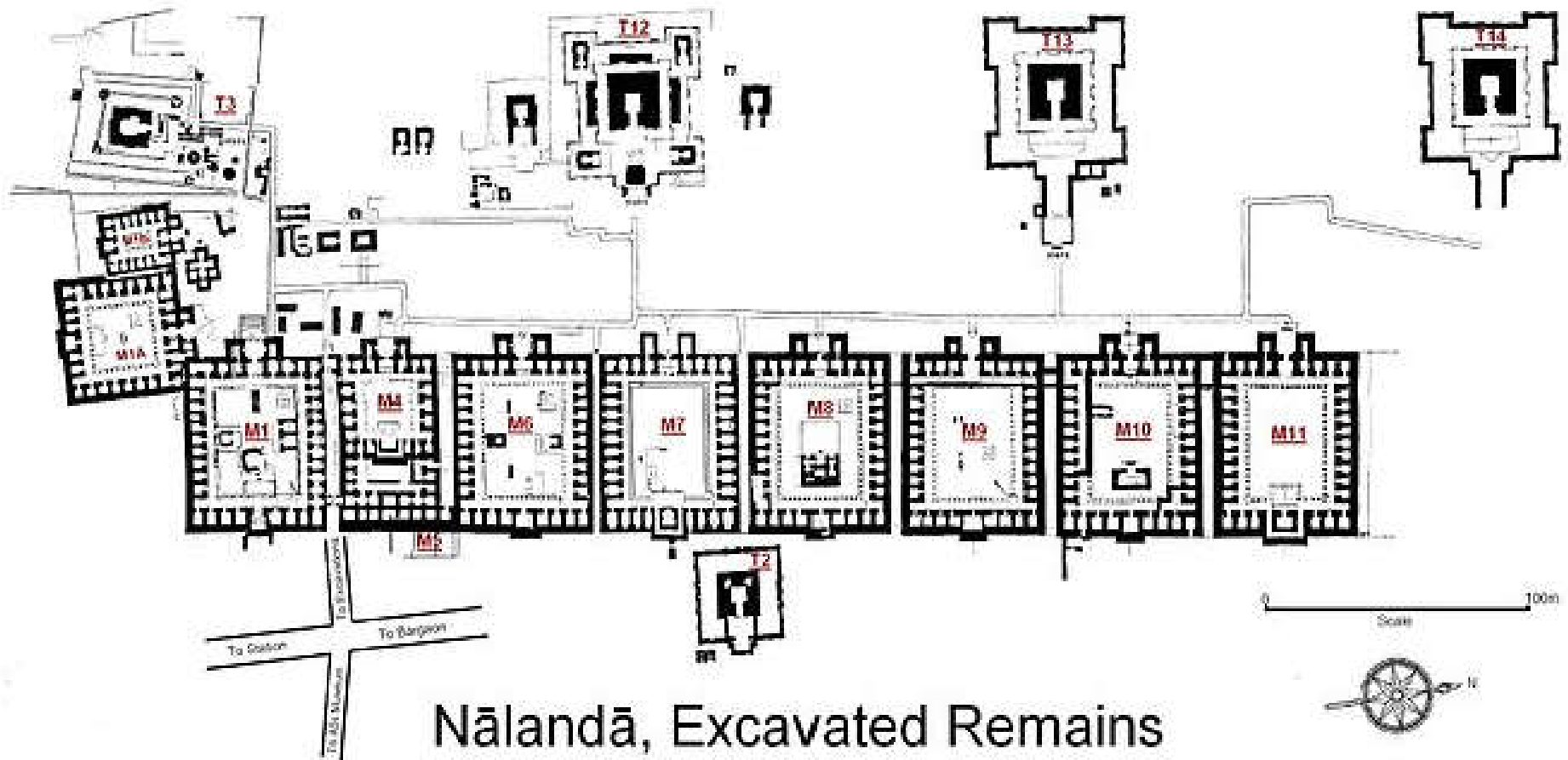
- According to the records Nalanda University was destroyed three times by invaders, but rebuilt only twice.
- The first destruction was caused by the Huns under Mihirakula during the reign of Skandgupta (455-467AD), but Skandgupta's successors restored the library and improved it with an even bigger building.
- The second destruction came in the early 7th century by the Gaudas, the Buddhist king Harshwardhana (606-648AD) restored the University.
- The third and most destructive attack came when the ancient Nalanda University was destroyed by the Muslim army led by the Turkish leader Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1193.



Some more pictures of Nalanda Ruins



Cell for monks in nalanda



Nālandā, Excavated Remains

Only 10 % of area is found till today and excavation were done by ASI. In June 2016 the site was declared as UNESCO world heritage site.



Lotus Pools made after excavation of Water Bodies

Thick walls of old Nalanda university

- Architect has also mentioned quarries used for excavation to make into pools of Lotus.
- It will make them the places of aqua – culture.

Thanks for your attention